

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.
Communications and Technology Subcommittee
Hearing on “Preserving Free Speech and Reining in Big Tech Censorship”
March 28, 2023

I am deeply disappointed with this hearing today. We could be having a serious discussion about the need to reform Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, but instead Republicans have chosen to focus on so-called “Big Tech Censorship.” This hearing is nothing more than red meat for the extreme conservative press – who will certainly eat it up. They’ll share it on social media where studies show conservative voices are dominant.

The voices of the Republican witnesses have been far from silenced. They are incredibly popular on Big Tech platforms. They are featured in countless videos on YouTube and TikTok. They have books for sale on Amazon, websites and E-mail newsletters with paid subscribers. They are guests on popular podcasts and regularly appear on right wing cable and streaming channels. Say what you want about them, but they certainly aren’t censored.

The Republican witnesses have engaged in pseudoscience to minimize the worsening climate crisis and seed dangerous ideas about COVID-19 and vaccines.

One bankrolls another social media personality that he’s called “heroic” for spewing vile anti-LGBTQ hate resulting in harassment, threats of violence and intimidation across the

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country. And, like the tech platforms themselves, I'm sure they profit handsomely from the controversy.

That's not to say there isn't real censorship happening across the country. But it's not the Democrats or the tech platforms that are responsible — it's the Republicans. In fact, the Republican Party is responsible for some of the most egregious First Amendment violations and censorship we have witnessed in years.

Republican-led states across the nation have considered bills that promote censorship and threaten free speech – giving a vocal minority the power to impose their extreme beliefs on everyone else in their community. They've banned books about African American history, suppressed information about safe abortions, and demanded teachers "Don't Say Gay." This is real censorship.

What Republicans are trying to do here today is to force private companies to carry content that is misinformation or disinformation, dangerous, or harmful. Companies have been moderating content since the beginning of the internet, and research has repeatedly refuted Republican claims of an anti-conservative bias in that moderation.

As I said, it is disappointing that we could not have a serious discussion about Section 230 reform. We all seem to agree there is harmful content on these platforms that should be taken down.

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Last week, at the TikTok hearing, we were all deeply troubled when we saw an implied threat against the Committee with imagery of a gun. We also saw examples of disturbing videos glorifying suicide and eating disorders, dangerous challenges leading to death, merciless bullying and harassment, graphic violence, and drug sales. This terrible content is harmful to all of us — but particularly our kids.

There is no doubt that Republicans and Democrats want social media platforms to better protect users from harmful content. We want to hold platforms accountable and bring about more transparency about how algorithms and content moderation processes work. Of course, the details matter tremendously here, and that is why our inability to have a serious conversation today is so frustrating.

Every day we allow courts to interpret Section 230 to indiscriminately shield platforms from liability for real-world harm is a day that further endangers our young people, our democracy, and our society as a whole.

Democrats will try to have a productive conversation today about these issues with our expert witness. With that, I yield back.